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NYPH09: Controversial Photographers

by Heather on May 18, 2009

Though no one seemed particularly offended by anything at NYPH09, there were a couple of shows that, on paper, could have been controversial. Chris Boot was one of the festival's four curators and in his show *Gay Men Play* he explores the contemporary photographic representation of gay sex and gay recreational sexual identities. From the guide:

In an article to be published in the forthcoming summer 2009 issue of Aperture magazine, Boot argues, "The use of photography by gay men early in the 20th century is among the most interesting aspects of the phenomenon of photography now," and his exhibition mixes the work of established photographers and artists with that of non-professional photographers.

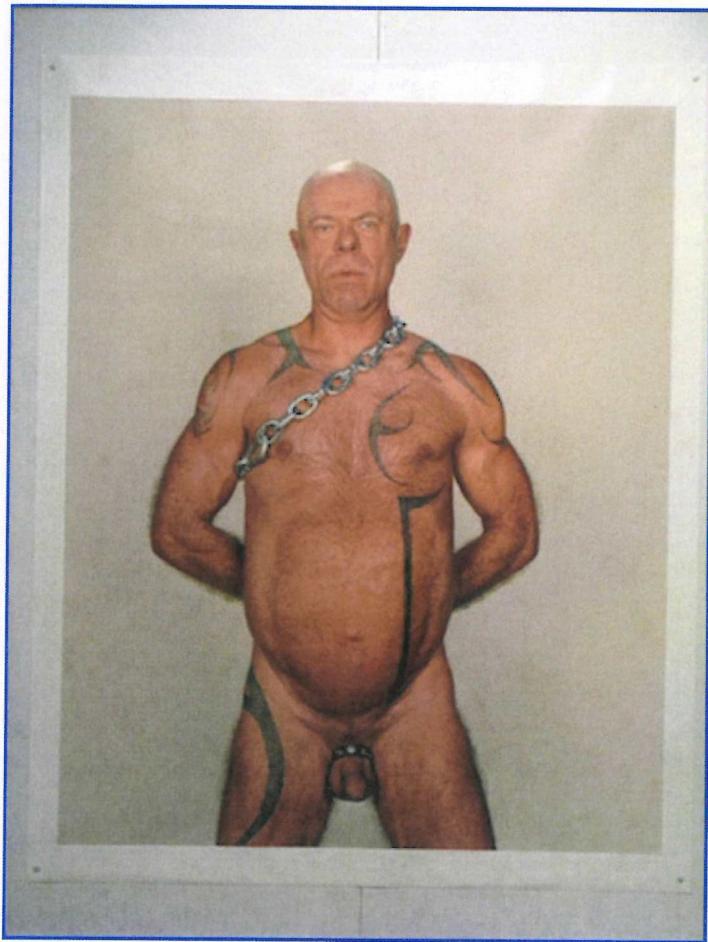
Ronit will tell us more:

According to Chris Boot, curator of the *Gay Men Play* exhibitions, gay men are on the forefront of the medium, acting out their sexual roles and identity on camera for all the world to see, if they choose to. Gay men are integrating the camera into their sexual lives in a way that no other photographers are, probably because they don't feel they need a tool to help them come into their own, sexually. In *Gay Men Play* the camera is essentially being used as a sex toy, at once complimenting but also serving as a venue for gay men's sexcapades.

Christopher Clary's Self-portrait (my collection) is wallpaper made up of jpeg images from gay social networking sites. For the past 10 years, Clary's been collecting the profile photos of guys he knows, would like to know, and would like to be. He was collecting these photos first as references to how he wants to be, and now he's finally achieved it. He's now one of those guys – aggressive, confident, provocative with his sexuality. So in a way, collecting these images has been a sort of "gay therapy" helping him come into his own as the gay man he wants to be.

I spoke with curator Chris Boot and he was surprised that no one in the gay community expressed anger with how the gay community is portrayed in the show, or at least tell Boot they were offended. I wonder why? Take a look at the photos below, are they offensive?

EXHIBIT 30
TO DECLARATION OF
WILLIAM LIVINGSTON



Here's one from Stefan Ruiz's incredible portrait series, San Francisco Berlin. Kind of like the gay equivalent to Richard Avedon's 1985 book, In the American West. Copyright Ronit Novak

